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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED IN ARMENIA'S HUMAN RIGHTS

OMBUDSMAN OFFICE

REF: YEREVAN 313

(U) Sensitive but Unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

[¶](#)11. (SBU) A recent report sponsored by the UN Development Program confirms that Armenia's Human Rights Ombudsman's office suffers from internal disorganization and an externally perceived lack of independence. During its first year of operation, the ombudsman's office has sent mixed messages and achieved few concrete results. The ombudsman accepted the report's recommended reforms, but may lack the vision to enact the suggested changes. End Summary.

DISORGANIZATION IN THE OFFICE

[¶](#)12. (SBU) According to the report's author, Dean Gottehrer, Armenia's Human Rights Ombudsman's office suffers from internal disorganization. His comments to members of the international community previewed an upcoming written report, sponsored by UNDP. In his comments, Gottehrer described office workflow as "circular" because the ombudsman personally makes all major decisions on each complaint. While the report commended the office for its mission statement, it also noted that the statement had been created without the input of major interest groups. As a result, the office finds itself tossed between the priorities of the Government, NGOs, the media, and citizen complainants.

UNCLEAR PURPOSE

[¶](#)13. (SBU) Local NGOs have told Post they feel uneasy in dealing with the ombudsman's office. They believe the office is too closely linked to the executive branch because the Armenian president appoints the ombudsman. (Note: The Armenian National Assembly has introduced a package of proposed constitutional amendments for a 2005 referendum which include a provision to transfer the power of appointing the ombudsman to the National Assembly. End Note.)

[¶](#)14. (SBU) Post has observed that the ombudsman's office has sent mixed messages and achieved few concrete results during its first year of operation. We welcomed the appointment of the current incumbent, Larissa Alaverdian in February 2004 (reftel), but were disappointed by her inaction or misdirection on several issues during the year. At our suggestion, the office verified the number of detainees held during spring political protests, but initiated little further action. At a September meeting with us, Alaverdian had difficulty articulating priorities for her office and seemed consumed with minor intra-governmental squabbles. After the Jehovah's Witnesses were recently registered in Armenia, Alaverdian stated publicly that she saw herself as a defender of the Armenian public against the group's door-to-door visits. (Note: In a separate meeting with President Kocharian's top aide, we underscored the positive impression the decision to register the Jehovah's Witnesses had made. He agreed, and added that, despite public pressure, the GOAM would not reverse this decision. End Note.)

COMMENT: OLD HABITS DIE HARD

[¶](#)16. (SBU) Alaverdian has expressed interest in improving her office and in Gotteher's recommendations in particular, including restructuring tasks, seeking

input from key stakeholder's groups, and revising the office's mission statement. She immediately went on, however, to list what she wants from the GOAM and the international community. She focused on obtaining tangible assets such as branch offices and computers rather than the internal processes suggested by the report. As in the September meeting with us, she seemed to lack a clear sense of priorities and emphasized building the Human Rights Ombudsman's office's prestige rather than its capacity. Despite her many good intentions, Alaverdian may lack the experience and vision for creating a new, efficient institution in Armenia.

EVANS